

COLOSSAL



“Moondog” (2024), glazed ceramic and acrylic on wood, 16.5 x 11.5 x 28.5 inches. All images courtesy of the artist and Derek Eller Gallery, shared with permission

Steve Keister Conjures Mythological Creatures from Clay, Wood, and Cardboard

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Art

Kate Mothes

From glazed ceramic, coated cardboard, wood, and acrylic paint, Steve Keister summons mythical beings and enigmatic animal-human hybrids. The artist's current exhibition, *Split Level* at Derek Eller Gallery, is a survey of work made during the past eight years, glimpsing the artist's ongoing exploration of Pre-Columbian art and architecture.

Keister's mixed-media sculptures initially emerged from experiments with salvaged styrofoam and cardboard packing cartons, which evoked the bold, blocky forms of Mesoamerican architecture like Aztec stone carvings and Mayan step pyramids.



"Leaf-Nose Bat" (2025), glazed ceramic and acrylic on wood, 23 x 33 x 6.5 inches

Through ongoing series like *Bio Meso*, *Batz*, and *Masked Figures*, Keister merges painting, sculpture, and craft techniques into three-dimensional portrayals of what the gallery describes as “bespoke deities that pay homage to Pre-Columbian myth.” Some creatures, like “Xoloitzcuintle,” represent real animals—in this case, a species of hairless dog.

Hybrid creatures like “Standing Bat II” and “Coyote Man” tap into oral histories and belief systems that span North America. Bats are historically emblematic of the boundary between life and death. And Coyote, a potent character in the folklore of numerous Indigenous North American peoples, is variously a magician, creator, glutton, and trickster.

Keister’s compositions range from wall reliefs to freestanding, monument-like sculptures to sprawling floor pieces. “At the core of his ethos is a profound interest in human and animal consciousness,” the gallery says. “Keister extrapolates his subjects from Central American mythology to develop a complex ecosystem of mystical fauna.”

Split Level continues through August 22 in New York City.



“Coyote Man” (2025), glazed ceramic and acrylic on wood, cement, 66 x 16.5 x 17.5 inches



“Xoloitzcuintle” (2025), glazed ceramic and acrylic on wood with found object, 25 x 20 x 33 inches



“Contrapposto” (2024), glazed ceramic and acrylic on wood, 30 x 24 x 4 inches



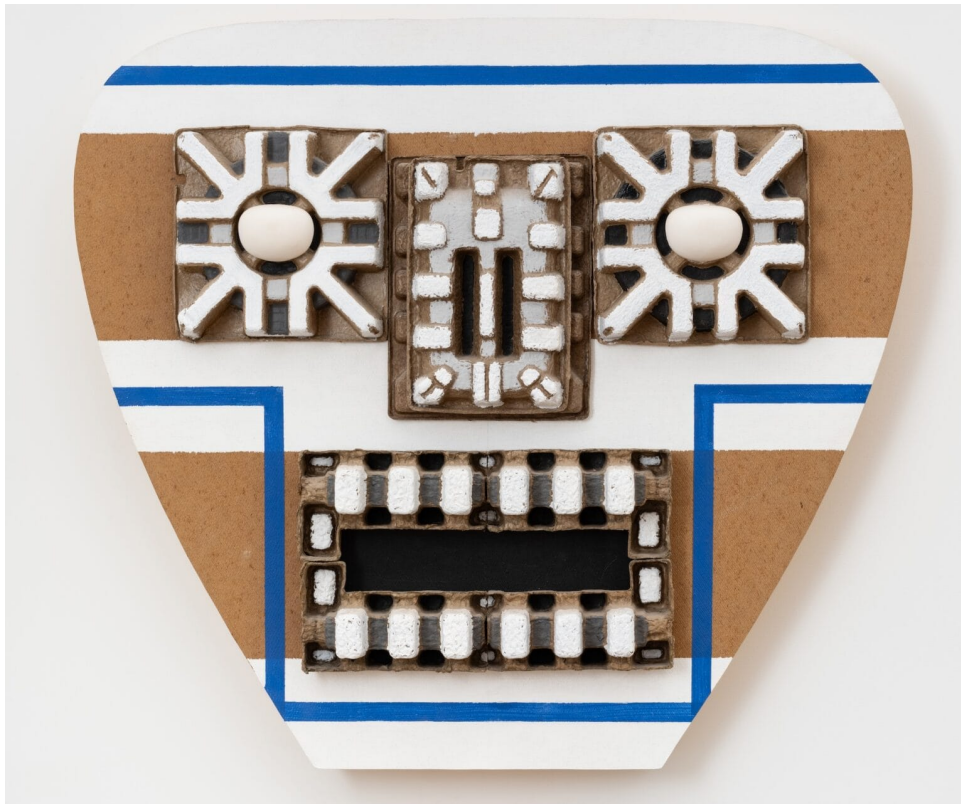
"Red Tabby" (2024), glazed ceramic and acrylic on wood, 11 x 14 x 3.5 inches



"Cosmic Crocodile" (2017), coated cardboard, glazed ceramic, cement and acrylic on wood, 5 x 32 x 55 inches



"Standing Bat II" (2022), glazed ceramic and acrylic on wood, cement, 65 x 48 x 12 inches



"Mictlantecuhtli" (2017), coated cardboard and acrylic on masonite on wood, 37.25 x 41 x 6.25 inches



"Lateral Bat" (2024), glazed ceramic and acrylic on wood, 40.25 x 24 x 4.25 inches